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Being Mindfully Pluralistic: The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Student Perceptions of Religious Pluralism

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Intended date of commencement: May 5, 2023

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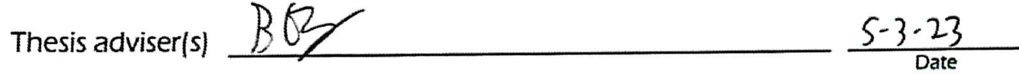

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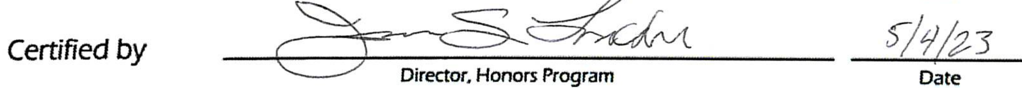

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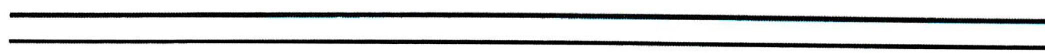

Being Mindfully Pluralistic: The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Student Perceptions of Religious Pluralism

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Psychology

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Meet A. Patel

May 3, 2023

Abstract

This study explored the relationship between mindfulness meditation practice and student perceptions of religious pluralism. One hundred and eleven Butler University students were recruited using SONA, an online psychology research participation management system, and in-person presentation/professor encouragement in the PWB Mindfulness in Everyday Life course. The study was conducted via a survey shared with the PWB class and SONA participants. I predicted that participants who consistently practice mindfulness meditation would have stronger perceptions that promote the values of respect, relationships, and common action that are associated with religious pluralism. Specifically, I predicted that participants who have consistently (at least 7 weeks) practiced meditation as a part of the PWB mindfulness meditation course (PG) would display more openness to the values of respect, relationship building, and common action than the control participants not in the class and without consistent practice (CG). Thus, the independent variables (consistent mindfulness meditation vs. not) were used to understand the impact on mean scores of the agreement towards values of respect, relationship-building, and common action. Participants in PG displayed more openness to the values of respect and relationship-building than those in CG. However, there were no significant differences in openness between participants of PG and CG for the value of common action. These findings will illustrate the potential role of mindfulness meditation practice on how plurally students perceive others from backgrounds different than their own. Future studies and analyses need to replicate the findings of this study with larger sample sizes and go beyond assessing perceptions to measuring the consequent actions of participants.

Being Mindfully Pluralistic: The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Student Perceptions of Religious Pluralism

What does it mean to be healthy and well? According to the World Health Organization, health is a "state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity." Following this definition in the WHO Constitution are other principles "basic to the happiness, harmonious relations and security of all people."[1] These can provide further definitions or understanding of what it means to be healthy and well, especially in the context of our social world. Sartorius (2006) discusses one such understanding of health as "a state of balance, an equilibrium that an individual has established within himself and his social and physical environment."[2] Focusing on this balance in the context of college students and their daily behaviors, universities implement wellness programs that tend to define wellness holistically. They strategically provide many opportunities for students to thrive and integrate various dimensions of wellness (mind and body, diversity and inclusion, intellectual, social, service and community, career and life skills, sustainability, and meaning and purpose).[3]

However, the success of such programs and initiatives depends on constant research and analysis of the patterns of student wellness behaviors. One study collected daily responses from college students on mood, exercise, sleep, nutrition, singing/playing musical instruments, and mindfulness practice. Over 88.7% of students reported at least one wellness behavior, with 17.7% reporting 4 or more. While there was immense variance across the year and even a single week, nearly all the behaviors were associated with a positive mood.[4] In addition to exploring the individual benefits of enhanced mood, it is interesting to explore the social benefits of wellness behaviors and how they can influence one's perception of others. Specifically, wellness practices that involve a level of skill, such as building awareness of not just the self but that of

others, is especially powerful in helping students develop in diverse social environments. One such practice that was included in Copeland et al. (2022) was mindfulness meditation.

The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines mindfulness as the awareness of one's internal states and surroundings that can help people avoid destructive or automatic habits. Mindfulness also helps to observe thoughts, emotions, and other present-moment experiences without judging or reacting to them. The theory and practice of mindfulness were gifted to the world by ancient Buddhist traditions. Outside of this original cultural and religious context, modern psychology and medicine have incorporated secular mindfulness practices into numerous therapeutic interventions, including mindfulness-based cognitive behavior therapy (MBCT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and mindfulness meditation.[5] Focusing on the last two decades, clinicians have used mindfulness practice to treat anxiety, stress, and depression, with studies that show improved cognitive outcomes.[6] Also beginning to tap into the potential of mindfulness training are elite military forces, which observed improved attention and working memory task performance correlated to mindfulness training.[7] In education, Vacarr (2001) emphasizes the role of teachers in developing multicultural competence through empathy, curiosity, and a nonjudgmental attitude toward the self and the experiences of diverse students.[8] For college students, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic, mindfulness-based group therapies have reported greater self-compassion and less stress, anxiety, and sleep problems than controls.[9] In addition to these personal benefits, social benefits are also evident for students practicing mindfulness as it promotes forgiveness and compassion.[10] From psychology and medicine to education and the college experience, the vast potential of mindfulness practice to have a positive impact is evident. However, despite there being ample evidence to depict the role of mindfulness in reducing anxiety or stress and

developing compassion or empathy for college students, there is limited empirical evidence of how it promotes bridge-building across religious, spiritual, or ethical divides.

Current Study

This study explores the relationship between mindfulness meditation practice and student perceptions of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism is defined as "respect for people's diverse religious and non-religious identities, mutually inspiring relationships between people of different backgrounds, and common action for the common good."[11] In the words of Eboo Patel, "Religious Pluralism is neither mere coexistence nor a forced consensus. It is a form of proactive cooperation that affirms the identity of the constituent communities while emphasizing that the well-being of each depends on the health of the whole."[12] Eboo emphasizes that pluralism entails going beyond tolerance into the acts of understanding each other so deeply that we begin to grow collectively while enriching each other's traditions. Thus, the role of pluralism is not to promote certain religious, spiritual, or ethical principles above others but to invite and engage the differences and disagreements to use them as the basis for powerful relationships and collective, meaningful actions. As presented by Patel et al. (2021), this is possible on all levels of society, from medicine and global health to urban communities and college campuses. For college students, similar to the role of mindfulness meditation in promoting wellness, the practice of pluralism not only builds appreciative knowledge of cultural and religious diversity but also contributes to student growth and wellness through reflections on questions of meaning, purpose, and values.[13] While pluralism and mindfulness meditation individually provide ample evidence of promoting student wellness, the relationship between the practice of the latter on the perceptions of the former is yet to be fully explored.

A previous, comprehensive model emphasizes the role of mindfulness meditation in promoting “empathy, appreciation, and understanding of those who practice religions [or secular practices] other than one’s own.” The model also depicts mindfulness meditation's impact on processing “unwarranted fears and prejudices” and the “constructive engagement with actual religious differences.” This is possible through “cognitive flexibility” and “open-mindedness” (products of mindfulness meditation), which contribute towards the development of respect, relationships, and common acts (values of religious pluralism) with those of different religious, spiritual, or ethical backgrounds.[14] The current study extends the theoretical framework of Polinska, 2011. Specifically, I wish to empirically test the theorized relationship between mindfulness meditation (MM) and religious pluralism (RP). This study will be given to individuals with various levels of MM practices assessing the perception of RP. First, I predict that students who have consistently practiced MM as a part of “Physical Well-Being (PWB) 109 – Mindfulness in Everyday Life” (a course offered through the core curriculum at Butler University) for at least 7 weeks will display more openness to the values of respect, relationship building, and common action than those who practice MM without the course or not at all. Those who consistently practice MM as part of PWB 109 will be referred to as the PWB group (PG). Those who are not in the class will be referred to as the control group (CG). These findings will add empirical support to the theories of how consistent MM practice has all the ingredients to help students perceive others more plurally. Second, I predict that students who have practiced mindfulness meditation without the PWB 109 will display less openness than PG but more openness to the same values than those without any MM practice. Those who have practiced MM without the PWB 109 group will be referred to as No PWB Group (NPG). Those who have neither practice MM nor are enrolled in PWB 109 will be referred to as No

Meditation Group (NMG). This study will not only help to add empirical support to existing theoretical frameworks but also shed light on future studies focusing on how mindfulness meditation goes beyond the initial perceptions to action components of religious pluralism.

Methods

Participants

One hundred ten Butler University students were recruited using SONA, an online psychology research participation management system, and in-person presentation/professor encouragement in the PWB 109 - Mindfulness and Meditation. For the primary hypothesis, data from thirty-four participants who took other PWB courses were eliminated to focus on those that strictly took PWB 109 - Mindfulness and Meditation (PG; $n = 35$) or did not (CG; $n = 41$). Out of these seventy-six participants, sixty-five chose to share their gender identity. Out of these, 81.5% identified as female and 18.5% as male. Regarding race, out of sixty-six participants who responded, 64.5% of participants identified as White/Caucasian, 5.3% as Hispanic/Latino, 3.9% as Asian, 1.3% as Black/African American, and 10.5% as multiracial. Out of the same group, 18.2% were first-years, 36.4% were sophomores, 21.2% were juniors, and 24.2% were seniors. All participants were between 18 and 22 and were either enrolled in the PWB course or not.

The complete data ($n = 110$) was used to explore the relationship between those who took the PWB course and meditated consistently (PG; $n = 35$), those who did not take the PWB course and meditated not as consistently (NPG; $n = 40$), and those who did not take the PWB course and did not meditate at all (NMG; $n = 35$). Out of these one hundred ten participants, ninety-eight chose to share their gender identity. Out of these, 83.7% identified as female, 15.3% as male, and 1% as non-binary. Regarding race, out of the same group of participants

who responded, 84.7% of participants identified as White/Caucasian, 9.2% as Hispanic/Latino, 5.1% as Asian, 2.0% as Black/African American, and 8.7% as multiracial. Out of the same group, 13.6% were first-years, 29.1% were sophomores, 25.5% were juniors, and 20.9% were seniors. All participants were between 18 and 22 and were either enrolled in the PWB 109 course, another PWB course, or no PWB course. Participation was completely voluntary, but students who participated from SONA received one-half of a credit hour worth of extra credit toward the psychology class they chose as an incentive. PWB students who could not use extra credit in psychology class were offered a $10 Starbucks gift card or a voucher for any 1 drink on the menu for their time participating in the study. The study was conducted via a survey.

Design

A one-way, between-participants was designed to assess the effect of consistent mindfulness meditation practice on perceptions of religious pluralism. This experiment was guided by the independent variables (consistent mindfulness v. not) that were used to understand the impact on the dependent variables (perception of religious pluralism). The nuances in this study were associated with the various dependent variables that will assess participant perception of religious perception. The values assessed were respect, relationships, and common action (strongly agree to disagree Likert scale), which are the major ones under the aforementioned definition of pluralism. Additional dependent variables assessed were from the participants' reactions to the youtube videos on religion (intended to be neutral videos that show how religions spread over time and what people from different religions look like). Participants' perceptions of what they saw in the video would have been further qualitative data to assess their perception of religious pluralism.

Materials

The survey questions are from the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey (IDEALS). According to Interfaith America, a national non-profit focusing on making interfaith cooperation a social norm, this survey is "the most comprehensive study of its kind, examining student perceptions of—and engagement with—religious diversity throughout college. From 2015-2019, this large-scale study followed a national sample of students enrolled at 122 diverse campuses, including liberal arts colleges, religiously affiliated institutions, and a variety of public universities. The survey asked questions about students' commitment to bridging religious divides, interfaith friendships, on-campus experiences of religious diversity, knowledge of different religions, and attitudes toward people with different religious and political perspectives. Findings in this culminating IDEALS report answer a fundamental question: To what extent is the collegiate experience preparing students to be successful leaders in our religiously diverse society?" My survey focuses on the aspects of attitudes toward people from different religious perspectives, and the specific measures are the degree of respect, building relationships, and common action.

There are a total of four statements about respect, two statement about building relationships, and six statements about common action. Sample respect statements are: "I respect people with religious, spiritual, or secular identities that differ from mine" and "I feel a sense of goodwill toward people of other religious, spiritual, or secular identities." Sample relationship-building statements are: "When encountering people with different religious, spiritual, or secular perspectives, I try to identify values we have in common" and "I try to build relationships with people who hold religious, spiritual, or secular beliefs I disagree with." Finally, sample common action statements are "It is important to serve along with those of

diverse religious, spiritual, or secular backgrounds on issues of common concern" and "How likely are you to participate in an interfaith action, such as joining an interfaith movement, an interfaith organization, or working with those of different religious, spiritual, or secular identities to help solve social problems?" Including informed consent, background questions, statements on perceptions, two videos, qualitative responses, and demographic information, there were a total of 38 items in the survey.

Procedure

At the beginning of the survey, participants were given a description of what they would be expected to complete in the survey. They were also told that the study would take 20-30 minutes to complete, their information would be handled confidentially, and their participation would be voluntary. Finally, they were asked to sign an informed consent before completing the survey. Qualtrics questions were designed in a flow to evaluate the frequency and duration of meditation practice, and the same flow was designated to help assign them to the different conditions of enrollment in the PWB course or not. When they reached the videos, participants could not skip forward to the next question until the duration of the video length had passed. After the videos, participants read hypothetical scenarios and responded to similar statements as before relating to the scenario. At the end of the survey, participants were debriefed about the goals of this study and given my contact information for any questions or concerns.

Results

Hypotheses and Associated Analysis

My first hypothesis was that students who have consistently practiced MM (PG) as a part of "Physical Well-Being (PWB) 109 – Mindfulness in Everyday Life (a course offered through the core curriculum at Butler University) would display more openness to the values of

respect, relationship building, and common action than those who practice MM without the course or not at all (CG).To test the first hypothesis, I conducted a series of independent samples t-tests to compare the mean responses. The means were from the participant agreement (strongly agree = 1 to strongly disagree = 5) towards statements of respect, relationship, and common action. My second hypothesis was that students who have practiced mindfulness meditation without the PWB 109 (NPG) would display less openness than PG but more openness to the same values than those without any MM practice (NMG). To test the second hypothesis, I conducted a series of one-way ANOVAs to compare the mean responses between the three groups. My third hypothesis was that, out of all the participants, the percentage of those who responded with either strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statements would be consistent with the national IDEALS survey.

Hypothesis 1

For all of the following results, the mean responses of 35 participants in PG were compared with the mean responses of 41 participants in the CG. 34 participants who took other PWB courses were eliminated to maintain focus on those who took PWB 109 and practiced consistent MM for at least 7 weeks compared to those who did not. A series of independent samples t-tests were conducted to analyze the perceptions of respect, relationship building, and common action statements.

Perceptions of Respect

When asked, “I respect people who have religious or nonreligious perspectives that differ from my own,” PG scored lower (M = 1.11, SD = 0.40) than CG (M = 1.37, SD = 0.92). This difference was not statistically significant (t (56.8) = -1.59, p = 0.06). When asked, “There are people of other faiths and religions whom I admire,” PG scored significantly lower (M =

1.40, $SD = 0.85$) than CG ($M = 1.78$, $SD = 0.99$), $t(74) = -1.79$, $p = 0.04$. When asked, "I feel a sense of goodwill toward people of other religious or nonreligious perspectives," PG scored significantly lower ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.520$) than CG ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(64.91) = -2.80$, $p = 0.003$). Lastly, when asked, "I have a positive regard toward others even when I deeply disagree with their beliefs," PG scored significantly lower ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.74$) than CG ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.14$), $t(69.46) = -1.97$, $p = 0.03$). See Figure 1

Perceptions of Relationship Building

When asked, "When encountering people with different religious or nonreligious perspectives, I try to identify values we have in common," PG scored significantly lower ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 0.70$) than CG ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.87$), $t(74) = -2.14$, $p = 0.02$. When asked, "I try to build relationships with people who hold religious or nonreligious beliefs that I disagree with," PG scored significantly lower ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.05$) than CG ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.95$), $t(74) = -1.68$, $p = 0.049$). See Figure 2

Perceptions of Common Action

When asked about the likeliness of participating in diversity training on campus, participating in an interfaith action, participating in interfaith dialogue, enrolling in a religion course, or attending a religious service for a different tradition (a total of 5 other statements), there was no difference in the mean scores. The only significant difference was when asked, "It is important to serve with those of diverse religious backgrounds on issues of common concern," PG scored significantly lower ($M = 1.17$, $SD = 0.51$) than CG ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 0.94$), $t(63.77) = -2.86$, $p = 0.003$. Hence, only 1 out of the 6 statements in this value was significantly different. See Figure 3

Hypothesis 2:

For the following results, the mean responses of 35 participants in PG were compared to the mean responses of 40 participants in PNG and 35 responses for PMG. Thus, the complete data set (n = 110), including those who took other PWB courses, was used. A series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted to analyze the perceptions of respect, relationship building, and common action statements.

Perceptions of Respect

When asked, "I feel a sense of goodwill toward people of other religious or nonreligious perspectives," a one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores between at least two groups ($F(2, 107) = 3.621$, $p = 0.030$). Fisher's LSD test for multiple comparisons found that only the mean for PG ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.52$) was significantly different than PMG ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 0.97$) ($p = 0.03$). While the mean for PNG was right in the middle ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 0.72$), there was no significant difference between either PG or PMG. When asked about the other three statements about the value of respect, there were no significant differences between PG, PNG, and PMG. See Figure 4.

Perceptions of Relationship Building

When asked, "When encountering people with different religious or nonreligious perspectives, I try to identify values we have in common," PNG had no significant difference ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 0.78$) from PG ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 0.70$; $p = .14$) or PMG ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.82$; $p = .97$). When asked, "I try to build relationships with people who hold religious or nonreligious beliefs that I disagree with," PNG had no significant difference ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 0.91$) than PG ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.05$; $p = 0.74$) or PMG ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.95$; $p = 0.15$). See Figure 5

Perceptions of Common Action

When asked, “It is important to serve with those of diverse religious backgrounds on issues of common concern,” a one-way ANOVA revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in mean scores between at least two groups ($F(2, 107) = 2.86$, $p = 0.06$). However, Fisher’s LSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean for PG (M=1.17, SD = 0.51) was significantly different than PMG (M = 1.57, SD = 0.98) ($p = 0.02$). While the mean for PNG was in the middle (M = 1.48, SD = 0.640), there was no significant difference between either PG or PMG.

When asked, “How likely are you to participate in an interfaith action, such as joining an interfaith movement, an interfaith organization, or working with those of different religious, spiritual, or secular identities to help solve social problems?” a one-way ANOVA revealed that there was an almost statistically significant difference in mean scores between at least two groups ($F(2, 107) = 3.09$, $p = 0.050$). However, Fisher’s LSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean for PNG (M = 2.83, SD = 1.11) significantly differed from PMG (M = 3.46, SD = 1.12; p =0.02). PNG was not significantly different than PG (M = 2.94, SD = 1.24; $p = 0.66$)

When asked, “How likely are you to participate in interfaith dialogue on campus? (Interfaith dialogue can include conversations where people of different faiths and secular views are present and have differing opinions than you on core values and central beliefs),” a one-way ANOVA revealed that there was also an almost statistically significant difference in mean scores between at least two groups ($F(2, 107) = 2.77$, $p = 0.07$). However, Fisher’s LSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean for PNG (M = 2.55, SD = 1.20) significantly differed from PMG (M = 3.23, SD = 1.35; $p = 0.02$). PNG was not significantly different than PG (M = 2.77, SD = 1.24; $p = 0.45$). See Figure 6.

Hypothesis 3:

The following results will compare the percentage of participants in the IDEALS survey that responded with either strongly agree or somewhat agree for each statement compared to those who did the same across the complete data collected (n=110).

Perceptions of Respect

In the IDEALS survey, when asked about the aforementioned statements about respect, admiration, goodwill, and positive regard, the percentages of participants who either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed were 96%, 93%, 90%, and 82%, respectively. In the current study, the percentages for the same statements were 96%, 83%, 87%, and 76%, respectively.

Perceptions of Relationship Building

In the IDEALS survey, when asked about the aforementioned statements about identifying common values and building relationships with others, the percentages of participants who either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed were 78% and 65%, respectively. The current study's percentages for the same statements were 87% and 54%, respectively.

Perceptions of Common Action

In the IDEALS survey, when asked about the aforementioned statement about serving with others, the percentages of participants who either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed were 89%. The current study's percentage for the same statement was 90%. In the IDEALS survey, there were also percentages of participants who participated in diversity training (9%) on campus, participated in an interfaith action (11%), participated in interfaith dialogue (14%), enrolled in a religion course (26%), or attended a religious service for a different tradition (38%). In the current study, the percentages of participants who were either strongly likely or

somewhat likely to participate in the same activities were 44%, 43%, 47%, 46%, and 28%, respectively.

Video Results

Data from the post-video and hypothetical statements were not analyzed due to the reduction in sample size. Some participants did not complete this section because they could not move on from the video, so only the data from the prior statements were analyzed. Data from the qualitative response portion of the study was also not analyzed due to time constraints.

Discussion

The core objective of this study was to determine whether consistent mindfulness meditation practice increases openness to the values of religious pluralism. As mentioned, this study is unprecedented because it extends the theoretical framework of Polinska, 2011 by empirically testing the relationship between MM and RP. Before discussing the results, it is important to clarify that the participants in PG were enrolled in PWB 109 courses. They consistently practiced for at least 7 weeks (out of 35 total participants in PG, 21 practiced for 7 weeks, and 14 practiced for 14 weeks). This is important to consider because the courses are designed to develop consistent practice within and outside of class. Thus, even though the control group had some participants who had personal practice, there was no way to verify if that was a consistent practice as that of the participants in the class. It is also important to emphasize that the courses were taught secularly, except for introductory education about the roots of mindfulness meditation practice in ancient Buddhist traditions. Thus, minimal elements within the course would specifically educate or promote religious pluralism. Finally, throughout this discussion, it is helpful to understand that the lower mean scores are associated with either stronger agreement for the statements or a higher likelihood of participating in the activities.

First, the results for mean differences between the PG and CG for the values of respect are consistent with the first hypothesis. For three out of four statements of respect, the mean scores for PG are significantly lower than CG. This means that the students who consistently practiced MM displayed more openness to the value of respect than those who did not. Specifically, the means for respecting (1.11) and having goodwill towards others (1.29) from different traditions were the closest to 1, which would be strong agreement. The means for admiring (1.40) and having positive regard toward others (1.76) were higher, suggesting that these are more challenging forms of respecting others from different backgrounds. The statement for positive regard mentioned doing so despite "deeply agreeing with their beliefs." Hence, the significant difference between PG (1.76) and CG (2.17) allows us to think about the potential role of MM in empowering respect despite a deep ideological difference. Last, although there was no significant difference between PG (1.11) and CG (1.37), the trend is consistent with the overall hypothesis.

Next, the results for mean differences between the PG and CG for relationship-building values are consistent with the first hypothesis. Regarding identifying common values across differences, PG is right between strongly agreeing and somewhat agreeing at 1.49, whereas CG is closer to somewhat agreeing at 1.88. Again, we can consider the role of MM in nurturing a nonjudgmental attitude and collective transformation that leads to a stronger perception of identifying common values. One of these common values can be relationship-building itself. As for specifically building "relationships with people who hold religious or nonreligious beliefs that I disagree with," similar to the positive regard statement above, this is a more challenging form of building relationships that limits PG closer to somewhat agree (2.2) and CG to neither agree nor disagree (2.59). Here, it can be helpful to consider the fears and prejudices that may

be additional barriers to building relationships. While MM seems to have an impact in potentially reducing these for PG, I feel that combining MM with implicit bias education or other forms of processing fears or prejudices can be beneficial.

Finally, the results for mean differences between the PG and CG for most of the common action statements were inconsistent with the hypothesis. The only significant difference between PG (1.17) and CG (1.66) was for a general statement of serving on issues of common concern. While this is promising regarding how MM has a role in helping PG strongly agree with the value of serving, the transfer does not occur when asked how likely they are actually to partake in specific interfaith activities. This ultimate value of not just respecting and building relations but also acting with others across differences seems to be the least helped by MM. There is an abundance of hesitancy, with most of the scores for PG and CG being around 3, which is "undecided" on the scale. The fact that these values are not closer to 4 or 5 shows that both groups are not opposed to these opportunities and may simply need more information or encouragement to realize the value of overcoming any notions of fear, prejudice, or judgment.

Furthermore, the second hypothesis is interesting to explore because the complete data set is utilized to understand the difference in perceptions between PG, PNG, and PMG. Here, I focused on how different PNG could be from PG and PMG. Regarding respect, all but the statement about respecting others followed a trend where the means for PNG (1.58, 1.5, and 1.95) are in the middle of PG (1.4, 1.29, and 1.74) and NMG (1.77, 1.77, and 2.11). Again, we saw a general increase in the positive regard statement, likely due to the same reasons mentioned for the other hypothesis. Due to this general trend, the second hypothesis is partially consistent because PNG has mean values that show more openness than PMG and less openness

to respect than PG. However, the only significant difference is with PG and PMG for the goodwill statement, so this hypothesis is not fully supported. Nonetheless, the role of MM in nurturing more respect is evident in the trend of PG and PNG compared to PMG, which of course, had participants that did no MM at all.

Next, unlike the first hypothesis, the findings for the value of relationship-building are completely inconsistent with the second hypothesis. PNG barely has the expected trend for the statement of building relationships and otherwise has no significant differences compared to PG and PMG. Finally, the last part of the second hypothesis concerns mean differences between the groups for openness to the perception of common action. Unlike the first hypothesis, there were significant differences for three out of six statements, which makes the results partially consistent with the hypothesis. For the “service with others” statement, a similar trend is observed, with a PNG mean of 1.48 (between highly likely and highly unlikely) being in between PG and PMG. However, since the only significant difference here is between PG (1.17) and PMG (1.57), the hypothesis of PNG being significantly different from PG and PMG is inconsistent. Contrastingly, for the “interfaith action” and “interfaith dialogue” statements, PNG (2.83 and 2.55 respectively) are significantly different from PMG (3.46 and 3.23). This introduces the potential of MM to promote more openness in participating in interfaith action and interfaith dialogue amount those who were not a part of PWB 109. Since the PG means for these statements are paradoxically higher (less likely to participate), this hypothesis is only partially supported. Nonetheless, being in between somewhat likely and undecided (for PNG) compared to being close to undecided (for PG) or between undecided and somewhat unlikely (for PMG), it is important to consider why this might be. Is it that those who practiced MM outside of the PWB 109 course developed the intrinsic motivation to more openly perceive

interfaith action and dialogue? What is the difference in the type of MM or other wellness behaviors they practice that leads to a significantly more open attitude towards the activities than those who do not? More importantly, what might be lacking in the PWB 109 course or the type of MM practiced that is less effective at nurturing openness toward common action? These are some questions that remain unanswered from this study.

Finally, pausing the comparisons between the MM groups provides an understanding of how the IDEALS survey results match up with the overall results of this study. Since the statements used were the same, I expected the percentages of those who responded with strongly agree or somewhat agree to be similar. The results showed that this was mostly true across all statements with an agreement scale. The biggest difference was 11% for both the relationship-building values. The current study had 11% more than IDEALS for identifying common values and 11% less for the statement on building relationships. The most interesting comparison, once again, was the actual participation percentages of IDEALS participants versus the percentage of participants in this study who perceive themselves to be more open. Of course, there is a massive difference between the diversity and size of the samples that might lead to this; however, an important question emerges: To what extent does MM practice influence the perceptions versus the real, plural actions?

Of course, this study aimed to understand the perceptions of respect, relationship-building, and common action in those who consistently practice MM versus those who do not. I have found some strong evidence to suggest significant differences in openness to the values of religious pluralism. Still, it is imperative that future studies replicate and build on this work to fully understand the mechanisms behind not just how MM influences perceptions but the real actions of those who consistently practice. Individually, mindfulness meditation and

religious pluralism provide college students and all aspects of society with countless powerful benefits. Further exploring their relationship can amplify their impact on wellness behaviors and create a new narrative on how individuals can find a balance within their social environments.

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Appendix

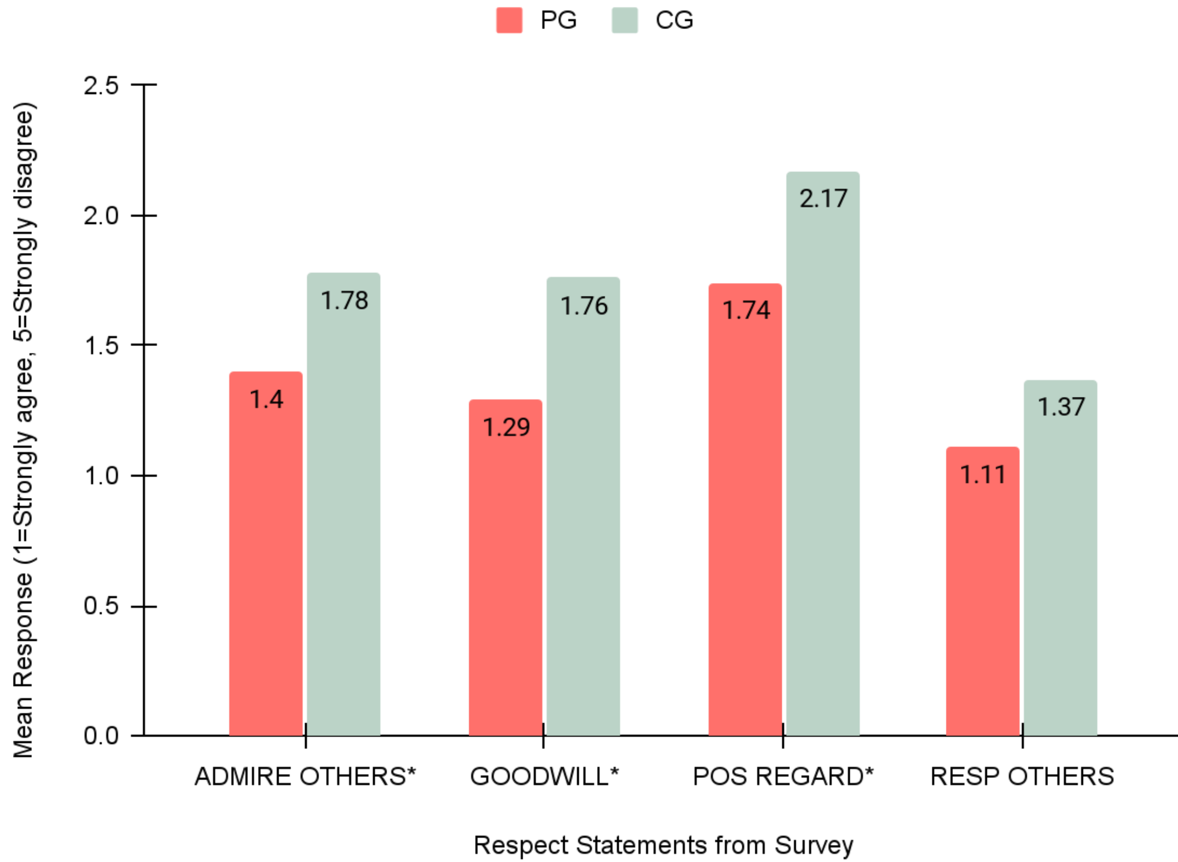

Figure 1
Mean comparison in agreement (lower score = stronger agreement) between PWB 109 Group (PG) and No PWB 109 Group (CG) for statements of respect (significant differences have *)

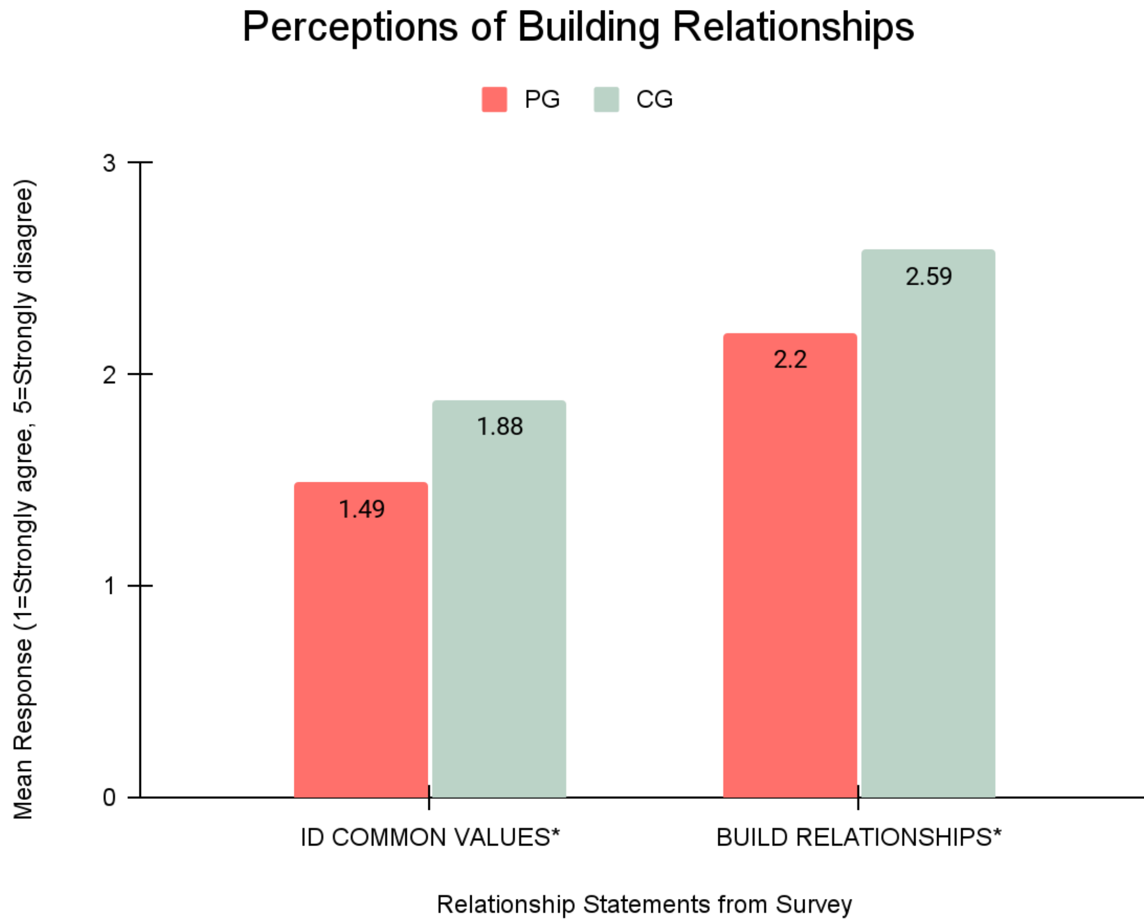

Figure 2
Mean comparison in agreement (lower score = stronger agreement) between PWB 109 Group (PG) and No PWB 109 Group (CG) for statements of relationship-building (significant differences have *).

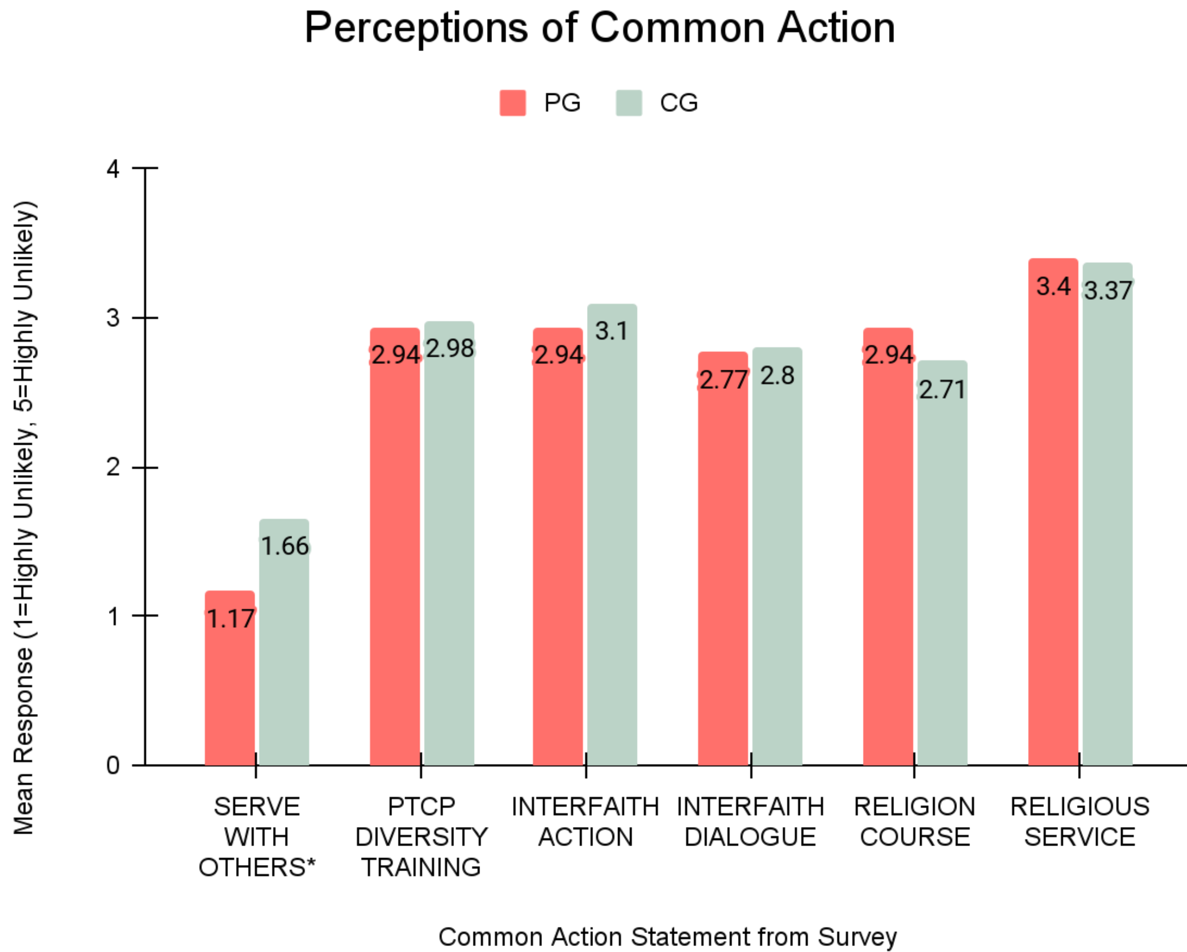

Figure 3
Mean comparison in agreement (lower score = stronger agreement) between PWB 109 Group (PG) and No PWB 109 Group (CG) for statements of common action (significant differences have *).

Figure 4
Mean comparison in agreement (lower score = stronger agreement) between PWB 109 Group (PG), No PWB 109 but Yes MM Group (PNG), and No PWB and NO MM Group (PMG) for statements of respect (significant differences have *)

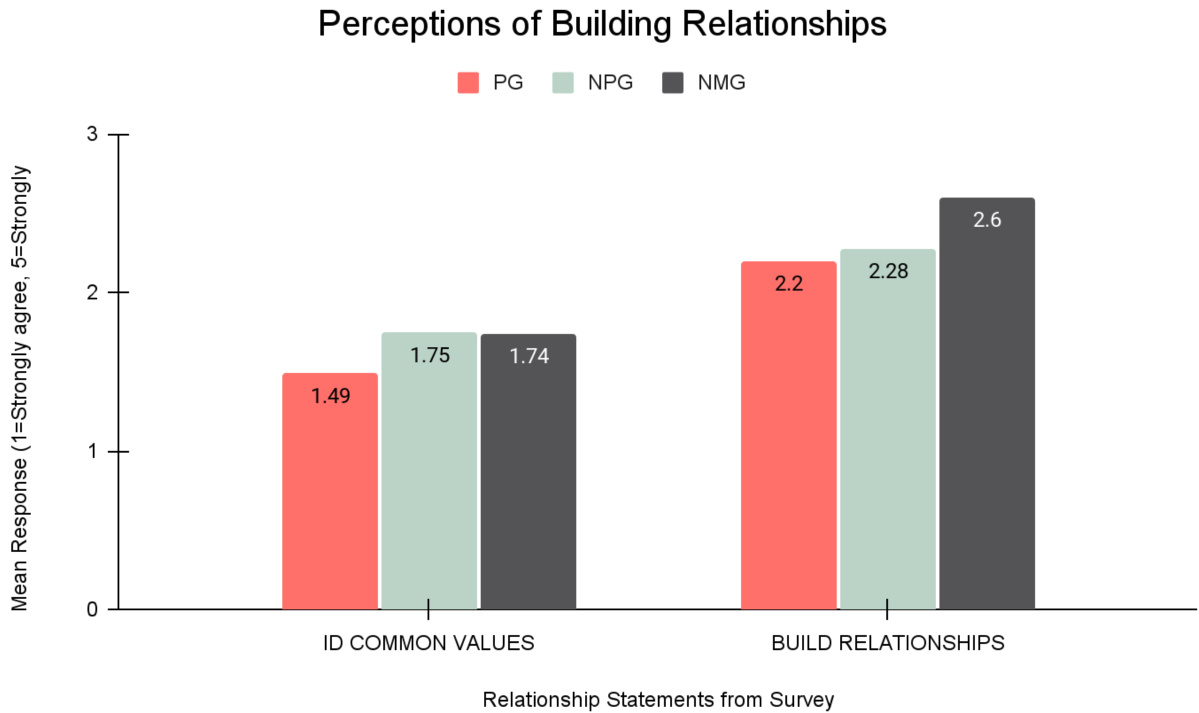

Figure 5
Mean comparison in agreement (lower score = stronger agreement) between PWB 109 Group (PG), No PWB 109 but Yes MM Group (PNG), and No PWB and NO MM Group (PMG) for statements of relationship building (significant differences have *)

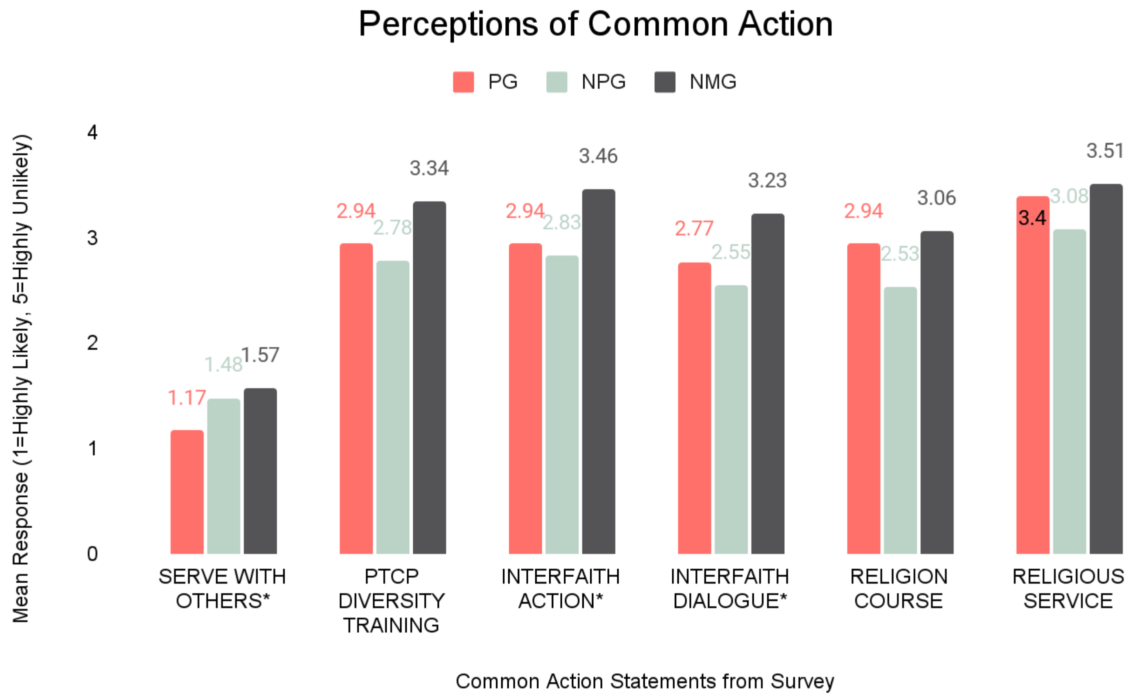

Figure 6
Mean comparison in likeliness (lower score = stronger agreement) between PWB 109 Group (PG), No PWB 109 but Yes MM Group (PNG), and No PWB and NO MM Group (PMG) for statements of common action (significant differences have *)